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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: PM RETHINKS DISSOLVING COALITION

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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

11. (SBU) Late-breaking local news on November 19 that Kosovo's junior coalition partner Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) was entering into a pre-election agreement with the opposition Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) for December 13 municipal runoffs, sparked a brief and tense coalition crisis that threatened to bring down the government. After the LDK's announcement, Prime Minister Thaci notified us that this pre-election partnership between LDK and AAK violated LDK's coalition agreement with his Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), and Thaci said that he intended to dismiss the LDK and form a new government with two other opposition parties: Behgjet Pacolli's New Kosovo Alliance (AKR) and Nexhat Daci's Democratic League of Dardania (LDD). This news swept across Kosovo with frequent updates on national television; November 20 morning papers were filled with speculation about the coalition's health and stability. By mid-morning on November 20, following a meeting between Prime Minister Thaci and President Sejdiu, the crisis was over, and both parties issued statements saying that the government will continue in its present form.

AN EVENING'S BAD IDEA RETHOUGHT IN LIGHT OF DAY

12. (SBU) The temporary PDK-LDK rift, according to Thaci, was due to the fact that the parties' coalition agreement precludes either from entering into an election agreement with any other party. PDK is running candidates in 17 mayoral runoffs on December 13, and ten of those races see PDK and LDK faceoff against one another. LDK is counting on AAK's support to increase its vote total during the runoffs, and this jeopardizes PDK's chances to dominate mayoral races. With his threat to kick LDK out of government, Thaci may have hoped to intimidate LDK, and scare them out of closer relations with AAK at the municipal level. However, if that was his plan, it seems to have backfired, and flip-flops have made him look both petulant and indecisive. Representatives from both AKR and LDD told us and the media this morning that they have had no discussions with PDK about joining the government, and Pacolli in today's media distanced himself from rumors that he was prepared to enter

government.

EMBASSY URGES RESPECT FOR CONSTITUTION

13. (SBU) We were in frequent contact with leaders from across the political spectrum during the evening hours of November 19 and throughout the morning on November 20. Our principal message was that coalition negotiations are a domestic political issue, but all parties needed to think through the consequences and not act in the heat of the moment. We also counseled all parties to respect Kosovo's constitution and laws, and to steer clear of any "extra-constitutional" solutions. Speculation during the evening on November 19 that Prime Minister Thaci would try to remove Kosovo President Fatmir Sejdiu (LDK) risked a constitutional crisis, as Sejdiu had been elected by the Kosovo Assembly to a five-year term in 2007. Constitutional requirements permit the Assembly to remove the president from office only for criminal acts or illness. Neither condition exists. We warned Thaci that we would not countenance any extra-constitutional attempt to force Sejdiu out of office and that this would damage Kosovo's reputation worldwide and hurt its chances during upcoming oral proceedings before the International Court of Justice on the legality of the country's declaration of independence.

COMMENT

14. (SBU) By most accounts, Prime Minister Thaci acted rashly last night when he decided to dismiss the LDK from the coalition about an hour after he learned of the LDK-AAK agreement. He had not consulted with either AKR or LDD, and he would have had trouble in securing votes to maintain a government. In fact, this was Thaci at

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his worst -- emotional, impulsive, and hasty. It appears that the folly of his exercise was clear to him the following morning, when he came away from a meeting with President Sejdiu with nothing to show. His bid to dump LDK failed, and LDK will proceed with its pre-election agreement with AAK. The ship is righted for now, and talk of an impending government collapse has attenuated, but Pristina's political class is chattering about a critical miscalculation that has weakened Thaci's authority. Events of the previous 24 hours have damaged the coalition, perhaps beyond repair, and the likelihood of early national elections next year is higher than ever. At the same time, the good news is that the system worked, and it survived a critical political test. Better still, the Kosovars worked it out themselves. Even as the recriminations continue in the aftermath of this flap, it was a good learning experience for them all. END COMMENT

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